

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

GUZ 32 Jonah

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - XXXII*

David Guzik

David Guziks' Commentary On
32 Jonah
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

Jonah Flees the Presence of the Lord

Jon 1:1 One day the LORD spoke to Jonah son of Amittai.

Jon 1:2 He said, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and speak out against it; I am aware of how wicked its people are."

Jon 1:3 Jonah, however, set out in the opposite direction in order to get away from the LORD. He went to Joppa, where he found a ship about to go to Spain. He paid his fare and went aboard with the crew to sail to Spain, where he would be away from the LORD.

Jon 1:4 But the LORD sent a strong wind on the sea, and the storm was so violent that the ship was in danger of breaking up.

Jon 1:5 The sailors were terrified and cried out for help, each one to his own god. Then, in order to lessen the danger, they threw the cargo overboard. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone below and was lying in the ship's hold, sound asleep.

Jon 1:6 The captain found him there and said to him, "What are you doing asleep? Get up and pray to your god for help. Maybe he will feel sorry for us and spare our lives."

Jonah Is Thrown into the Sea

Jon 1:7 The sailors said to each other, "Let's draw lots and find out who is to blame for getting us into this danger." They did so, and Jonah's name was drawn.

Jon 1:8 So they said to him, "Now, then, tell us! Who is to blame for this? What are you doing here? What country do you come from? What is your nationality?"

Jon 1:9 "I am a Hebrew," Jonah answered. "I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made land and sea."

Jon 1:10 Jonah went on to tell them that he was running away from the LORD. The sailors were terrified, and said to him, "That was an awful thing to do!"

Jon 1:11 The storm was getting worse all the time, so the sailors asked him, "What should we do to you to stop the storm?"

Jon 1:12 Jonah answered, "Throw me into the sea, and it will calm down. I know it is my fault that you are caught in this violent storm."

Jon 1:13 Instead, the sailors tried to get the ship to shore, rowing with all their might. But the storm was becoming worse and worse, and they got nowhere.

Jon 1:14 So they cried out to the LORD, "O LORD, we pray, don't punish us with death for taking this man's life! You, O LORD, are responsible for all this; it is your doing."

Jon 1:15 Then they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and it calmed down at once.

Jon 1:16 This made the sailors so afraid of the LORD that they offered a sacrifice and promised to serve him.

A Great Fish Swallows Jonah

Jon 1:17 At the LORD's command a large fish swallowed Jonah, and he was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

Jonah 1:1-17

Jonah 1 - Jonah Runs from God

A. Jonah's attempted escape.

1. (1-2) God's call to Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city,

and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

a. **The word of the LORD came to Jonah:** God spoke to Jonah in His own unique and powerful way and He told Jonah to do two things. First, **go to Nineveh**; second, **cry out against it** – that is, to rebuke them for their sin and call them to repentance.

b. **Go to Nineveh:** The city of **Nineveh** was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and was a large and prominent city in its day. It was not a city of Israel at all; God called Jonah to go to a pagan, Gentile city and call *them* to repentance.

i. Ancient historians say that Nineveh was the largest city in the world at that time. It was the large, important capital of a dominating empire – surely an intimidating place to go.

c. **For their wickedness has come up before Me:** God wanted Jonah to go because He saw their **wickedness**. None of man’s wickedness is hidden before God. He sees it all, and it may come to a point where it demands the specific warning and judgment of God.

2. (3) *Jonah’s attempt to flee from God’s call.*

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

a. **But Jonah arose to flee:** Jonah was a reluctant prophet. He didn’t want to do what God told him to do. Several reasons for this have been suggested.

i. It may have been because he was given a *difficult job to do*. Nah 3:1-4 gives us a good idea of how wicked the people of Nineveh were. Jonah had every

reason to expect that at the very best, he would be mocked and treated as a fool. He might be attacked and killed if he did what the LORD told him to do.

ii. It was also because Jonah didn't *want* the Assyrians in Nineveh to escape God's judgment. Imagine a Jewish man in New York during World War II hearing God say, "I'm going to bring terrible judgment on Germany. I want you to go to Berlin and tell Nazi Germany to repent." Instead of doing it, the man heads for San Francisco and then hops on a boat for Hong Kong.

iii. We may speculate on why Jonah did not want to do what God told him to do, but it is even better to think about why we don't do what God tells *us* to do. God told Jonah to *go* and preach; every Christian has the same command in Mat 28:19-20. With Jonah's example before us, we have *even less reason than Jonah* for our disobedience.

b. **To flee to Tarshish:** The distant city of **Tarshish** was thought to be towards the end of the earth, and is always associated with ships in the Bible. Jonah wanted to go as far as he could to escape God's presence, but this was a futile attempt.

i. Nineveh was to the east of Israel and **Tarshish** was about as far as you could go west, on the coast of what is today Spain, past the straits of Gibraltar. In heading for **Tarshish**, Jonah intended to get as far away from Nineveh and the calling of God to go there as he possibly could.

c. **Found a ship going to Tarshish:** We don't doubt that Jonah *felt* like going **to Tarshish**. There was an impulse within him driving him there, but it was a dangerous impulse. We may take Jonah as an example of

the danger of doing things solely under impulse or feelings.

i. "Now, I very commonly meet with persons who say, 'I felt that I must do so and so. It came upon me that I must do so and so.' I am afraid of these impulses - very greatly afraid of them. People may do right under their power, but they will spoil what they do by doing it out of mere impulse, and not because the action was right in itself." (Spurgeon)

- An impulse may be very brave, yet wrong (Jonah was very brave in embarking on such a long sea-journey).
- An impulse may appear to be self-denying, yet wrong (it cost Jonah much in money and comfort to go on this long sea-journey).
- An impulse may lay claim to freedom, yet be wrong (wasn't Jonah free to go to Tarshish?).
- An impulse may lead someone to do something that they would condemn in others (what would Jonah say to another prophet disobeying God?).
- An impulse can make us do to God or others what we would never want to be done to our self.

ii. Many people take their inner impulses and say, "The LORD told me this or that." This is dangerous even when it doesn't seem so immediately. "What have you to do with the devices and desires of your own hearts? Are these to be a law to you? I pray you, be not among the foolish ones who will be carried about with every wind of fancy and perversity. 'To the law and to the testimony,' should be your cry, and you may not appeal to inward movements and impulses" (Spurgeon).

d. **So he paid the fare:** It seemed *easy* enough. Perhaps even Jonah felt that the LORD provided the money for **the fare**! This shows the danger of being guided by *circumstances*.

i. "Providence or no providence, the Word of the Lord is to be our guide, and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances. *It is very easy to make up a providence when you want to do so.* If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence." (Spurgeon)

ii. Nevertheless, when you run away from the LORD, you never get to where you are going and you always pay your own fare. When you go the LORD's way, you not only get to where you are going, but He provides the fare.

e. **From the presence of the LORD:** Jonah should have read Psa 139:7-10 : *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.* You can't escape the presence of God.

i. "All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were." (Spurgeon)

B. God prevents Jonah's escape.

1. (4) *God sends a storm.*

But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

a. **The LORD sent out a great wind:** It was the LORD who stirred up the storm. We often think of Jesus calming the waters, and He can do that. But God can also stir up the storm.

b. **So that the ship was about to be broken up:** The ship and the sailors were in a dangerous place. This was all due to Jonah being on the ship. There was nothing wrong with the sailors being on the ship, but Jonah had no business there – though on other circumstances it might have been fine for him to go to Tarshish.

i. Jonah might have wondered: “I can go to Tarshish if I want to. I paid the fare. I’m not a stowaway.” Yet, “Apologies for disobedience are mere refuges of lies. If you do a wrong thing in the rightest way in which it can be done, it does not make it right. If you go contrary to the Lord’s will, even though you do it in the most decent, and, perhaps, in the most devout manner, it is, nevertheless, sinful, and it will bring you under condemnation” (Spurgeon).

2. (5-6) *The sailors of the ship seek their superstitious gods.*

Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

a. **Every man cried out to his god:** When in trouble, man does his best to fix the problem. In this case, they

threw the cargo overboard. When that isn't enough, man also instinctively turns to **his god**. If we don't know the true God – the God of the Bible – *before* we are in trouble, we may sincerely turn to a false and imaginary god, one of our own making.

i. Many people assume that they can put off doing their business with God until they choose a “better” time to do it. Nevertheless, it is presumptuous to think that in the moment of crisis we will be able to call upon the true God if we have not dealt with Him before.

b. **Was fast asleep:** While the storm raged, Jonah slept. Perhaps because the storm *outside* seemed insignificant to him in comparison to the storm *inside*, the storm that came from his resistance against God.

i. What a curious and tragic scene! All the sailors were religious men, devout in their prayers to their gods. Yet their gods were really *nothing*, and could do *nothing*. There was one man on board who had a relationship with the true God, who knew His Word, and who worshipped Him – *yet he was asleep!*

ii. “Jonah was asleep amid all that confusion and noise; and, O Christian man, for you to be indifferent to all that is going on in such a world as this, for you to be negligent of God's work in such a time as this is just as strange. The devil alone is making noise enough to wake all the Jonahs if they only want to awake... All around us there is tumult and storm, yet some professing Christians are able, like Jonah, to go to sleep in the sides of the ship.” (Spurgeon)

iii. The nature of Jonah's sleep is also instructive, and too much like the sleep of the careless Christian:

- Jonah slept in a place where he hoped no one would see him or disturb him. "Sleeping Christians" like to "hide out" among the church.
- Jonah slept in a place where he could not help with the work that needed to be done. "Sleeping Christians" stay away from the work of the Lord.
- Jonah slept while there was a prayer meeting up on the deck. "Sleeping Christians" don't like prayer meetings!
- Jonah slept and had no idea of the problems around him. "Sleeping Christians" don't know what is really going on.
- Jonah slept when he was in great danger. "Sleeping Christians" are in danger, but don't know it.
- Jonah slept while the heathen needed him. "Sleeping Christians" snooze on while the world needs their message and testimony.

iv. Some sleeping Christians protest that they are not asleep at all.

- "We talk about Jesus" – but you can *talk* in your sleep.
- "We have a walk for Jesus" – but you can *walk* in your sleep.
- "We have passion for Jesus – I just wept in worship the other day" – but you can *cry* in your sleep.
- "We have joy and rejoice in Jesus" – but you can *laugh* in your sleep.
- "We think about Jesus all the time" – but you can *think* while you are asleep; we call it *dreaming*.

v. Charles Spurgeon described how the believer might know that he is *not* asleep. "What do you mean by a

man's being really awake? I mean two or three things. I mean, first, his having a thorough consciousness of the reality of spiritual things. When I speak of a wakeful man, I mean one who does not take the soul to be a fancy, nor heaven to be a fiction, nor hell to be a tale, but who acts among the sons of men as though these were the only substances, and all other things the shadows. I want men of stern resolution, for no Christian is awake unless he steadfastly determines to serve his God, come fair, come foul."

c. **What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God:** The captain knew that his crew cried to their gods, but it did nothing. Perhaps Jonah's God could do something in the crisis.

i. It must have seemed ironic to Jonah that the sailors demanded that he call on his God. His only reason for being on that ship was to *escape* his God.

3. (7-8) *The sailors discover that Jonah is the source of the trouble.*

And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble *has* come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause *is* this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

a. **That we may know for whose cause this trouble *has* come upon us:** It is hard to know what motivated the sailors to think that the storm was sent because one of them had wronged their God. Perhaps it was because of some spiritual insight, and they sensed a *spiritual* power in the storm. Or, perhaps it was just an accidentally correct superstition.

b. **The lot fell on Jonah:** Once the lot fell on Jonah, the sailors wanted to know as much as they could from Jonah, so they could solve the problem and save their lives.

c. **What is your occupation:** 2Ki 14:25 says that Jonah was a recognized prophet. When he was asked, **"What is your occupation?"** and he answered, "prophet" then the sailors must have been even more terrified.

4. (9-10) *Jonah tells them about who he is and what he has done.*

So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

a. **The God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land:** Jonah knew the truth about God, even though his claim to **fear the LORD** was only partly true because he was running from the LORD.

i. Even a believer who is in a state of rebellion can give glory to God if he will only tell the truth about God. Although, it is tragic that Jonah's *life* contradicted his knowledge of God.

ii. However, at the moment when Jonah said, **"I fear the LORD,"** he may have already repented of running away, turning back to God because of the present circumstances.

c. **Why have you done this?** Even an unbeliever who knows *some* truth about God can rightly rebuke a Christian who is resisting God. **"Why have you done**

this?"is the most logical question in the world, even for an unbeliever to ask a believer.

5. (11-16) *Jonah, at his own request, asks to be thrown into the sea, and the sailors reluctantly agree.*

Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" – for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me." Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You." So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

a. **What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?** The more the sailors hear, the worse the situation gets - **the sea was growing *more* tempestuous.**

b. **Pick me up and throw me into the sea:** Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life to save everyone else on the ship. We may consider what his motive might have been.

- Perhaps it was compassion for the sailors.
- Perhaps it was a desire to be forced into complete dependence upon God alone. After all, There is no safer place than casting yourself totally upon God.
- Perhaps it was a feeling that *anything* was better than his continual resistance against and running from God.

- Perhaps because he had already truly repented. If this is the case, it illustrates that repentance is not only a matter of heart and mind, but also a matter of *action*.

- i. In all this, Jonah is a wonderful picture of the Messiah that would come after him, Jesus Christ. Jesus threw Himself into the fury of God's storm to rescue those far from God. However, here are many differences between Jonah and Jesus, and one of the greatest was that Jonah was disobedient and guilty, and Jesus was completely obedient and innocent.

- c. **Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land:** The sailors did not want to throw Jonah into the sea, because they believed his God was for real and they feared the consequences of throwing a prophet, even a disobedient prophet into the sea. Still, when all hope seemed to be lost they took precautions ("**We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood**") and threw Jonah into the sea.

- d. **The sea ceased from its raging:** The immediate end of the storm proved that Jonah's God was for real, and that Jonah's resistance to that God was the real problem. In a logical response the sailors **feared the LORD exceedingly**, sacrificed to God and made promises to serve Him.

- i. The sailors moved from fearing the storm to fearing the LORD, just the disciples in the boat did when Jesus calmed the storm (Mar 4:35-41).

- ii. "Brethren, I wish I had meet words with which I could fitly describe the peace which comes to a human heart when we learn to see Jesus cast into the sea of divine wrath on our account. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory can look back

upon past sins, with sorrow for the sin it is true, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come. It is a blessed thing for a man to know that he cannot be punished, that heaven and earth may shake, but he cannot be punished for his sin.” (Spurgeon)

e. **And took vows:** Notice that the vows of the sailors came *after* they were delivered. Based on this, many commentators believe that the sailors came to a true faith in God.

i. Spurgeon preached a sermon with four wonderful points based on the actions of the crew in this chapter.

- Sinners, when they are tossed upon the sea of conviction, make desperate efforts to save themselves.
- The fleshly efforts of awakened sinners must inevitably fail.
- The soul’s sorrow will continue to increase as long as it relies on its own efforts.
- The way of safety for sinners is to be found in the sacrifice of another on their behalf.

Jonah's Prayer

Jon 2:1 From deep inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God:

Jon 2:2 "In my distress, O LORD, I called to you, and you answered me. From deep in the world of the dead I cried for help, and you heard me.

Jon 2:3 You threw me down into the depths, to the very bottom of the sea, where the waters were all around me, and all your mighty waves rolled over me.

Jon 2:4 I thought I had been banished from your presence and would never see your holy Temple again.

Jon 2:5 The water came over me and choked me; the sea covered me completely, and seaweed wrapped around my head.

Jon 2:6 I went down to the very roots of the mountains, into the land whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O LORD my God, brought me back from the depths alive.

Jon 2:7 When I felt my life slipping away, then, O LORD, I prayed to you, and in your holy Temple you heard me.

Jon 2:8 Those who worship worthless idols have abandoned their loyalty to you.

Jon 2:9 But I will sing praises to you; I will offer you a sacrifice and do what I have promised. Salvation comes from the LORD!"

Jon 2:10 Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah up on the beach, and it did.

Jonah 2:1-10

Jonah 2 - In the Belly of the Fish

A. Jonah in the fish.

1. (1:17) Jonah's three days and nights in the fish.

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

a. **The LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah:** Some question if this could happen as the Bible says it did; but surely it is not a difficult thing for God to have **prepared a great fish**, even if that particular fish was a special creation for that moment.

i. We don't know what kind of **fish** this was. Some speculate it was a species of whale, others say it was a large fish known as the "sea-dog." All we can say for certain is that it was a lifeboat fish.

ii. There is a story of a whaler named James Bartley, who in 1891 reportedly fell into the sea while harpooning a large sperm whale. When the whale was killed and dissected, Bartley was found in the whale's stomach, unconscious but alive. While some have argued that the incident was carefully investigated and true, the widow of the ship's captain denied that it ever happened.

iii. It may be questioned if the story of James Bartley is true or not, but certainly the story of Jonah is true because *Jesus* said it was true. In Mat 12:40 we read that Jesus said *Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.*

b. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights: Though Jonah was a rebellious, resistant, and believer, God was not finished with him yet – so the LORD preserved his life.

i. God could have rescued Jonah in any number of ways. He chose this specific way because of the effect it would have on Jonah's heart.

ii. The book of Jonah shows us important principles about the sovereignty of God. What happens when God wants a person to do something, but the person doesn't want to do it? Jonah shows us that God has a way of bringing us to the place where we want what God wants.

c. Three days and three nights: Apparently, Jonah did nothing for three days and three nights in the belly of the fish; it was only after that period was over that he prayed the prayer following.

i. Some have wondered if Jonah spent the time sulking, and finally decided he had to repent fully and seek God – perhaps this was the case. However, the

starting point of the prayer in Jonah 2 seems to show that Jonah had cried out to God all the time. The prayer of Jonah 2 came *after* Jonah received assurance from God that he would be delivered.

2. (2:1-2) *Jonah praises God for His deliverance.*

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. And he said:

**"I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction,
And He answered me.
Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And You heard my voice."**

a. **Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly:** Jonah was still in the belly of the fish but he knew it was enough that the LORD had heard his cry (**You heard my voice**). In faith, Jonah knew that he would be delivered.

i. Jonah knew God heard him before the answer came. This shows that Jonah had faith and that God can give a total peace and assurance that prayer is answered, even before the actual answer comes.

b. **I cried out to the LORD:** In this and the rest of the chapter, Jonah's prayer uses many phrases and figures of speech from the Psalms. This shows that Jonah was a man who knew God's Word, and knew it by *heart*, because there was no Bible and no candle in **the fish's belly**.

- *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple. (Psa 18:6)*
- *Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me. (Psa 42:7)*
- *For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; nevertheless You heard the voice of my*

supplications when I cried out to You. (Psa 31:22)

3. (3-7) Jonah describes his trouble, his cry to God, and God's faithful answer.

**"For You cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the floods surrounded me;
All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.
Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;
Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'
The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;
The deep closed around me;
Weeds were wrapped around my head.
I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
The earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever;
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
O LORD, my God.
When my soul fainted within me,
I remembered the LORD;
And my prayer went *up* to You,
Into Your holy temple."**

a. **You cast me into the deep:** Jonah realized that it wasn't the sailors who cast him into the sea – it was God Himself. Jonah saw that he had never been out of God's hands, though he tried to run from Him.

b. **I have been cast out of Your sight:** Jonah's greatest pain was not the calamity, but his separation from God – his feeling that he was **cast out of Your sight**. Still he was determined – even in the belly of a fish – to turn his heart towards God and His **temple**. Simply, Jonah **remembered the LORD**.

c. **Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God:** Again, Jonah could praise God for the answer to prayer before the answer came, because God gave him assurance.

4. (8-9) *Jonah declares his commitment to God.*

**“Those who regard worthless idols
Forsake their own Mercy.
But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving;
I will pay what I have vowed.
Salvation is of the LORD.”**

a. **Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy:** Jonah realized that resisting God, running from Him, was like being an idolater.

b. **But I will sacrifice to You:** Jonah repented from running away from God, and he turned to God with sacrifice and thanksgiving. He promised to pay his vows to God, and do what ever God told him to do,

i. At one time or another, Jonah had probably said what we all have said: “Lord, I’ll do what ever You want me to do.” Now Jonah realized fully that he must stop resisting God and he should pay his vows to God.

c. **Salvation is of the LORD:** This was more than a statement of fact; it was Jonah’s triumphant declaration. God had saved and would save, and Jonah meant it *personally*. **Jonah’s salvation is of the LORD.**

i. Jonah knows this in the *close-up* picture; he knew that *his salvation is of the LORD*. He also now knew it in the *big picture*; that salvation is not of a nation or a race or a language, or not of man at all. No, **salvation is of the LORD.**

d. At the end of Jon 2:9 it is clear that Jonah has repented, but we might wonder *when* did Jonah repent? Jonah showed several marks of true repentance.

- Jonah proclaimed his fear of the LORD and he was honest about his sin and rebellion, no longer covering it up (Jon 1:9).

- Jonah allowed himself to be cast into the sea (Jon 1:12).
- Jonah began to pray; he called out to God during the three days and three nights in the belly of the fish (Jon 2:2; Jon 2:4; Jon 2:7).
- Jonah had a new heart of gratitude (Jon 2:9).
- Jonah renewed the commitment to his vow (Jon 2:9).
- Jonah gave glory to God in all of this (Jon 2:9).
 - i. In all this we see that repentance as more than a one-time event. Though it begins at one time, it must continue and mature. Repentance is an event but it is also a process.

B. Jonah out of the fish.

1. (10a) God speaks to the fish.

So the LORD spoke to the fish,

- a. **The LORD spoke to the fish:** The fish worked at the command of God. Just as much as the fish was under the command of God when it swallowed Jonah, it was under His command when it let him go.
- b. **To the fish:** If God can speak to a **fish**, He can speak to us. Then again, **fish** probably don't *resist* the will of God like we do.

2. (10b) Jonah is expelled from the fish.

And it vomited Jonah onto dry *land*.

- a. **Vomited Jonah:** Sometimes we don't have much of a choice about *how* we will be delivered. Jonah might have preferred another method, but God had a purpose in this also.
 - i. Jonah's deliverance came after Jonah's repentance was complete. Jonah wasn't just *sorry* for what he

did; he was now *trusting* God again. In many believers today, there is a work of God, or an aspect of His deliverance that will remain undone as long as that believer resists Him and refuses to trust God.

ii. Jonah's deliverance came after three days and nights had passed, providing a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus said, *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth* (Mat 12:40).

iii. When Jesus spoke of *three days and three nights* in Mat 12:40, it does make a Thursday crucifixion necessary. Rabbinic literature from the time of Jesus explains that the phrase "so many days and so many nights" was a figure of speech that could refer to any part of a day and night. Ellison notes that Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah (around the year A.D. 100) said: "A day and a night make a whole day, and a portion of a whole day is reckoned as a whole day." This demonstrates how in Jesus' day, the phrase *three days and three nights* did not necessarily mean a 72-hour period, but a period including at least the portions of three days and three nights.

iv. Pointing towards the Messiah to come, Jesus Christ, we see that Jonah's deliverance came after a remarkable demonstration of laying down one's life. Jonah gave his life to appease the wrath of God coming upon others. But death did not hold him; after three days and nights of imprisonment, he was alive and free.

b. **Onto dry land:** It is commonly thought that Jonah was vomited out on the shores of Nineveh – but we are not told that this was the case, especially because Nineveh is about 375 miles from the Mediterranean Sea.

If Jonah did walk into Nineveh right from the belly of the fish, it would have been a miraculous projection of the fish's vomit.

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

Jon 3:1 Once again the LORD spoke to Jonah.

Jon 3:2 He said, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to the people the message I have given you."

Jon 3:3 So Jonah obeyed the LORD and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to walk through it.

Jon 3:4 Jonah started through the city, and after walking a whole day, he proclaimed, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!"

Jon 3:5 The people of Nineveh believed God's message. So they decided that everyone should fast, and all the people, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth to show that they had repented.

The People of Nineveh Repent

Jon 3:6 When the king of Nineveh heard about it, he got up from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat down in ashes.

Jon 3:7 He sent out a proclamation to the people of Nineveh: "This is an order from the king and his officials: No one is to eat anything; all persons, cattle, and sheep are forbidden to eat or drink.

Jon 3:8 All persons and animals must wear sackcloth. Everyone must pray earnestly to God and must give up their wicked behavior and their evil actions.

Jon 3:9 Perhaps God will change his mind; perhaps he will stop being angry, and we will not die!"

Jon 3:10 God saw what they did; he saw that they had given up their wicked behavior. So he changed his mind and did not punish them as he had said he would.

Jonah 3:1-10

Jonah 3 - Jonah Preaches Repentance in Nineveh, the City Repents

A. Jonah's ministry in Nineveh.

1. (1-2) *The second call to Jonah.*

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

a. **Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time:** This shows the amazing love of God to His wayward people. Though Jonah did everything he could to resist the first call of God, after Jonah repented God called him again – though God was under no obligation to do it. He did it out of mercy and grace.

i. "By paralleling here the book's opening remarks, almost word for word, the author skillfully conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning." (Alexander)

ii. "How many of us who have been called to deliver the word of Jehovah, would still be doing it, if it were not for this patient and perfecting grace of God? Surely not many! How have we failed Him, and broken down in our ministry; and often not on ground so high as that of Jonah's failure." (Morgan)

iii. God was determined to do the work through Jonah, so He did not give up on the reluctant prophet. God is often just this committed to doing His work through a man. "Suppose that the problem had been given to us to solve - how shall this city be moved to repentance? How shall its vice be forsaken and the God of Israel worshipped by all its inhabitants from the highest to the lowest? If we had not been

paralyzed with despair, which is the most probable, we should, nevertheless, have sat down carefully to consider our plans. We should have parcelled it out into missionary districts; we should have needed at least several hundreds, it not thousands, of able ministers; at once, expenses would have to be incurred, and we should have considered ourselves bound to contemplate the erection of innumerable structures in which the Word of God might be preached. Our machinery would necessarily become cumbrous; we should find that we, unless we had the full resources of an empire, could not even begin the work. But what saith the Lord concerning this? Putting aside the judgments of reason, and all the plans and schemes which flesh and blood so naturally do follow, he raises up one man. By a singular providence he qualifies that one man for his mission.” (Spurgeon)

b. **Preach to it the message that I tell you:** Instead of telling Jonah to *cry out against* Nineveh, this time God simply tells Jonah to go there and wait for further instructions. God often works this way, and our flesh often finds it irritating that He does.

i. The story of Jonah demonstrates *why* God so often leads us one step at a time without telling us more. When God told Jonah what he would say in Nineveh, Jonah rejected the call. God often only tells us what we can handle at the time.

2. (3-4) *Jonah preaches in Nineveh.*

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey *in extent*. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then

he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

a. **Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD:** Having learned the lesson that resisting the will of God is both futile and counter-productive, Jonah now obeys the call and goes to Nineveh.

b. **Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent:** The idea behind this statement probably refers to how long it would take to walk around the city of "Greater Nineveh" – the metropolitan area around the city.

c. **Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!** Jonah emphasized to the people of Nineveh what would happen if they did not repent – the city would be **overthrown** in judgment. Undoubtedly, this was not Jonah's *whole* message to the people of Nineveh; but clearly it was his emphasis.

i. **"Overthrown"** is a word applied to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:25, Lam 4:6, and Amo 4:11).

ii. We see that Jonah preached this message with earnestness. "And such earnestness becomes a ministry that has to do with immortal souls, asleep and dead in sin, hanging on the brink of perdition, and insensible of their state. The soft-speaking, gentle-intoned, unmoved preacher, is never likely to awaken souls . . . But this earnestness is widely different from that noisy, blustering, screaming rant, that manifests more of a turbulence of disorderly passions, than of the real inspired influence of the Spirit of God" (Clarke).

B. The response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's message.

1. (5-9) The response of the people: repentance.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

a. **So the people of Nineveh:** The *word* "repentance" isn't in this passage; but repentance isn't really a word, it is something you *do* – and these people *did* repentance. One can have repentance without the word itself being spoken, and one can say the word "repentance" and never truly repent.

b. **The people of Nineveh believed God:** Repentance begins with believing God. As we believe Him and His Word, we have the power to transform our lives as He wills. You can do many other things associated with repentance, but if they do not begin with believing on and trusting God, they are all useless works of the flesh.

i. You can't *believe God* apart from the Word of God. Therefore, any real revival or repentance will begin

with faithful preaching and faithful hearing of God's Word, just as it was in Nineveh.

c. **The people of Nineveh... proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth:** Repentance means *doing* something. The people of Nineveh fasted, mourned as if for the dead, and they did it from the highest to the lowest (**from the greatest to the least of them**).

i. If repentance is anything, it is *not* business as usual. When repentance comes, something has to change and something has to be *different*. In their case, the people of Nineveh took off their normal clothes and put on **sackcloth** – a thick coarse cloth, normally made from goat's hair. Wearing it displayed the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures.

ii. **Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth:** They even repented on behalf of their animals, dressing them as if the animals were in mourning for the dead.

d. **But let man and beast... cry mightily to God:** Repentance means crying **mightily to God**. It means coming to God with passion and seriousness about your sin and your need for His mercy and forgiveness.

i. Many modern expressions of repentance, making excuses and justifying reasons for the sin, are really not repentance at all. Often they are only attempts to justify and excuse sin. Nevertheless, you sinned or you didn't; if you did, *there is no excuse*, and if you haven't, *there is no need to repent*. Repentance and excuses simply don't belong together.

e. **Yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands:** Repentance means turning from your **evil way and from the violence that is in your hands**. Repentance means to

change your mind and turn from your previous sinful actions.

i. In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; it describes the very process of turning to God. When we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him.

f. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger: Repentance has hope in the mercy and love of God. It hopes that God will **relent** and that the repentant people will **not perish**.

g. Jonah could more effectively preach the message of repentance because he knew his own need to repent and was himself a model of repentance (Jon 2:8-9). Being a repentant sinner didn't disqualify Jonah from preaching repentance; it made his preaching all the more effective.

2. (10) God's response to the people's repentance.

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

a. **God saw their works... and God relented:** God honored Nineveh's repentance, even though their *past* sin was just reason enough for an outpouring of judgment. The state would never forgive a cold-blooded murderer who vowed to never do it again, but God mercifully relented from judgment against the people of Nineveh.

i. We do not *obligate* God to forgive us when we repent. Instead, repentance appeals to God's mercy, not His justice.

b. God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it:

Did God's relenting make Jonah a false prophet, when he prophesied *Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown*? Not at all, for two good reasons.

i. First, God acted in total consistency with His Word: *The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it* (Jer 18:7-8). Jonah's preaching was like all warnings of judgment: it was an invitation to repent and avert the promised judgment. His words had an implied "if you do not repent" in front of them. Remember that we are not told the sum total of Jonah's preaching; though we should assume that the statement in Jon 3:5 is the central theme of what Jonah said, we should not assume it was

all that he said.

ii. Second, God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of Nahum). Nevertheless, in light of their repentance He delayed the promised judgment another 150 years.

Jonah's Anger and the Lord's Compassion

Jon 4:1 Jonah was very unhappy about this and became angry.

Jon 4:2 So he prayed, " LORD, didn't I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That's why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish.

Jon 4:3 Now then, LORD, let me die. I am better off dead than alive."

Jon 4:4 The LORD answered, "What right do you have to be angry?"

Jon 4:5 Jonah went out east of the city and sat down. He made a shelter for himself and sat in its shade, waiting to see what would happen to Nineveh.

Jon 4:6 Then the LORD God made a plant grow up over Jonah to give him some shade, so that he would be more comfortable. Jonah was extremely pleased with the plant.

Jon 4:7 But at dawn the next day, at God's command, a worm attacked the plant, and it died.

Jon 4:8 After the sun had risen, God sent a hot east wind, and Jonah was about to faint from the heat of the sun beating down on his head. So he wished he were dead. "I am better off dead than alive," he said.

Jon 4:9 But God said to him, "What right do you have to be angry about the plant?" Jonah replied, "I have every right to be angry—angry enough to die!"

Jon 4:10 The LORD said to him, "This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next; you didn't do anything for it and you didn't make it grow—yet you feel sorry for it!"

Jon 4:11 How much more, then, should I have pity on Nineveh, that great city. After all, it has more than 120,000 innocent children in it, as well as many animals!"

Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah 4 - God Deals with a Prophet's Heart

A. Jonah's complaint.

1. (1) Jonah's displeasure at the repentance of the people of Nineveh.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

- a. **It displeased Jonah:** This was strange, because usually the preacher is pleased when the congregation

repents, but Jonah wasn't. There was something about the whole matter that **displeased Jonah**.

b. **Exceedingly, and he became angry**: Not only was this strange, it was *very strange*, because Jonah was *very* upset at the success of his preaching. We should not miss Jonah's intensity here, because the language in the original Hebrew is strong.

2. (2-3) *Jonah explains his anger.*

So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!"

a. **I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm**: Jonah was angry because God granted repentance to the Ninevites, and the Assyrians were enemies of Judah and Israel. Jonah wanted God to bring judgment upon these people he hated.

i. Jonathan Swift wrote some verse that expresses Jonah's frame of mind:

*We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned;
There is no place in heaven for you,
We can't have heaven crammed.*

b. **Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country**: Jonah knew that God was full of grace and mercy, and *that* was why he was afraid to tell the people of Nineveh. This was at least part of the

reason why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh – he was afraid they would repent, when all along he wanted God to judge the Assyrian capital.

i. Jonah himself called on the mercy of God and enjoyed the mercy of God when it was extended to Jonah. Now he resents it when it is extended to others. What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat the people of Nineveh?

c. **For it is better for me to die than to live:** The repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh is so painful to Jonah that he would rather die than think about it; and he also states that this was the reason he fled the call - not out of fear that he would be ineffective, but fear that he *would* be effective!

B. God confronts a prophet.

1. (4) *God questions Jonah's heart.*

Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

a. **Is it right for you to be angry?** Jonah, in expressing his anger against God, was being honest about his feelings – something good; but we should not for a moment think that all of our feelings towards God are justified.

i. God likes to ask us questions, because they reveal our heart. It also put us on proper ground before God, because He has every right to question us and we owe Him answers.

- Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? What is this you have done? (Genesis 3)
- Where is your brother Abel? What have you done? (Genesis 4)
- What have you done? (1Sa 13:11)

- Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? (2 Samuel 12)
- Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? (Isaiah 6)
- Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16)
- What do you want Me to do for you? (Matthew 20)
- Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? (Luke 22)
- Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? (Acts 9)

c. **Is it right for you to be angry:** This is the question we should and even must ask ourselves if we find ourselves angry with God. The answer must always be "No, LORD. All Your ways are right even if I don't understand them."

- i. Yes, Jonah was angry towards God, and yes, it was all right for Jonah to state his anger towards God; but he must also repent of his anger towards God.

2. (5-8) *God prepares an object lesson for Jonah.*

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is better for me to die than to live.*"

a. **Jonah went out of the city... till he might see what would become of the city:** Jonah seems to hope that the repentance of Nineveh was lacking, and hopes that he will see the city destroyed after all. He goes **out of the city** for safety.

b. **The LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah:** Just as God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, now He prepared a particular plant to shelter Jonah as he waited, hoping that they city would be destroyed.

i. This is the first time we find Jonah happy. "Jonah was pleased because at last, after all the compassion of God for other people, God was finally doing something for Jonah. Selfish? Of course, it was. And petty too!" (Boice).

ii. We could say that Jonah's happiness was just as fleshly as his anger. Both were all about *self*.

c. **The sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint:** Jonah was angry with God because He brought the people of Nineveh to repentance (Jon 4:1). The ancient Hebrew word for "angry" is literally "to be hot." Now God would let *Jonah* feel some of the heat!

d. **Jonah was very grateful for the plant... "It is better for me to die than to live":** When God took the plant and its pleasant shelter away from Jonah, he missed the plant so much that he wanted to die.

i. "If, dear friends, like Jonah, you want to complain, you will soon have something to complain of. People who are resolved to fret, generally make for themselves causes for fretfulness." (Spurgeon)

ii. Jonah allowed even a silly thing like a plant to become an idol. "How often our gourds are allowed to perish, to teach us these deep lessons. In spite of all

we can do to keep them green, their leaves turn more and more sere and yellow, until they droop and die" (Meyer).

3. (9-11) *God applies the object lesson.*

Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and much livestock?"

a. Is it right for you to be angry about the plant:

Jonah, in response to God's question, felt totally justified in his anger about the sheltering plant's destruction. This is considering that the plant was just a plant, and Jonah had no personal interest or investment in the plant except what it provided for him at the moment.

i. Jonah made three errors that angry people often make. Each of these things put Jonah in a worse place, not a better place.

- Jonah quit.
- Jonah separated himself from others.
- Jonah became a spectator.

b. It is right for me to be angry, even to death:

These are the last words of Jonah recording in this book, but thankfully they are not the last words of the book. God's mercy and compassion still worked with Jonah, teaching him and guiding him to God's heart.

c. **And should I not pity Nineveh:** How much more should God be concerned about the destruction of *persons* – those made in His image, even if they are Assyrians. God's response to Jonah showed the prophet that he really didn't know God as well as he thought he did.

i. Those **who cannot discern between their right hand and their left** are those who are unable to make moral judgments.

ii. The lesson is clear: not only does God's concern for people go beyond Israel, but He is totally justified in doing so. The lesson of Jonah reminds us that God is the God of all people.

iii. The lesson of Jonah is what he proclaimed before being freed from the great fish: *Salvation is of the LORD (Jon 2:9)*, and not of any race or nation or class. This is the same message God made clear to Peter in *Act 10:34-35* : *In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*"

e. **Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city:** Jewish tradition says that after God said the words of *Jon 4:11*, Jonah then fell on his face and said: "Govern your world according to the measure of mercy, as it is said, *To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness.*" (*Dan 9:9*) We can only hope that Jonah – and we – would have such a humble response.

i. God showed His mercy to Jonah through a lot of *preparation*.

- The LORD prepared a great fish (*Jon 1:17*).
- The LORD prepared a plant (*Jon 4:6*).
- The LORD prepared a worm (*Jon 4:7*).

- The LORD prepared a wind (Jon 4:8).

ii. Nevertheless, the real work of preparation happened in *Jonah*. What God really prepared was a *person*, a *prophet*. "I would suggest to some of you here who have to bear double trouble that God may be preparing you for double usefulness, or he may be working out of you some unusual form of evil which might not be driven out of you unless his Holy Spirit had used these mysterious methods with you to teach you more fully his mind" (Spurgeon).